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PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

IN THEIR RELATION TO ARCHITECTURE,

AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE PRACTICE OF THE ITALIAN ARTISTS OF THE THIRTEENTH AND FOURTEENTH CENTURIES.

(Concluded from page 195.)



CHARITY.

FROM THE FRESCO BY GIOTTO IN THE CHAPEL OF THE ARENA AT PADUA.

THE work which Giotto did as a painter at Padua, at Pisa, at Rome, at Naples, as well as in Assisi and Florence, was mainly accessory to architecture, and though seldom, if ever, on buildings designed by himself, yet so complete was the mutual relation of the arts, that the joint product of painter and architect seems often but the creation of one spirit. Even in his time, however, and still in greater degree as time went on, painting became a more important element in the building than the architectural structure itself. The causes of this change were numerous; they lay deep in the moral and social conditions of the age, as well as in the natural evolution of the arts. The change was essentially of equal injury to both the arts, though the evil results were most conspicuous in architecture, and the single example of the Sistine chapel is sufficient to illustrate how both arts suffered from loss of sympathy in conjoint production.

But with this decline we will not occupy ourselves, but rather attempt to determine some of the principles which guided architect and painter in their common work in the better days of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In the very inception of his design the architect took account of painting as the chief assistant in producing the effect which he sought in his building. By its means he was to secure the color required, not merely to give the needed general tone and hue to his walls, but to reinforce the value and define the function

of the separate elements of his building, to give vivacity and interest to spaces otherwise lifeless,

to mark with distinctness the leading lines of his edifice, and to make the beauty of its proportions more obvious and impressive. To accomplish these ends, the painter recognized to be the object of his work. His art was primarily decorative; that is, it was to be in the first place appropriately beautiful in its color and in its relations, whatever else it might be. The double nature of his art occasioned him no perplexity. Within the scheme of color decoration he felt that there was abundant freedom of opportunity for the expression of emotion or sentiment,—for the representation of character or incident. He had, indeed, a story to tell, and the conditions upon which he was to tell it were not so much restraints as supports to his vivid imagination.

But though the first and fundamental object of the painter was to make his work decorative, and to enhance by it the character and beauty of the architectural spaces and forms upon or in relation with which it was to be displayed, his second and not inferior object was to make it interesting,—to awaken by its means the associations appropriate to the building which it adorned, and to quicken the emotions or stimulate the thoughts connected with the objects to which the building itself was dedicated. This task during the great centuries of Italian art was comparatively easy, for what may be called the public interests of men were concentrated to a much greater degree than in subsequent times upon two main topics: religion,—the relation of this world to another, the eternal destiny of man; and politics,—the true order and government of the state, or of the community of which each individual formed a part. Both of these great topics, and especially religion in all its aspects, presented themselves to the imagination in concrete and material forms, which rendered them natural subjects of pictorial representation. The faith of the multitude was ardent, and it was based upon simple, and for the most part material conceptions. The political ideas of the time were also simple, and held with a degree of passion the effect of which is difficult to realize in days of more complex and developed social theories and relations. The artist was himself wholly under the sway of the sentiment and faith of his people.

Moreover, the thirteenth century, and the early part of the fourteenth, in Italy, was an age in which the poetic imagination was stimulated beyond the usual measure. The inspiration of the poetic spirit was in the air that all men breathe. The shepherd boy on the mountain-side was filled with it, the artisan in the narrow street of the city did his work in unconscious obedience to the dictates of the imagination. It was the very atmosphere of art, and the artist, sensitive to all the influences of his time, and following closely, to use Dante's phrase, behind the dictator, gave the consummate expression to the faith and feeling of the community. It mattered not whether he was called to adorn church or cloister or public hall. The subject he was to treat would in any case be familiar. His part was to give to it the most impressive and direct treatment. His own soul was full of it. It had a real and vital interest to him, and to every man who should see his work. The same subject was frequently repeated, but each artist had his own way of presenting it, and it was to his advantage that the scene and its natural associations should require no explanation in words, but should appeal directly through the eye to the heart and the intelligence of the spectator. It is this absence of research, of remoteness, of novelty, which gave to the works great part of their power, and elevated their purely artistic character. They were not the expressions of merely individual fancies, of wilfulness or caprice of genius, dependent for effect upon special personal qualities or gifts, and requiring specially trained sympathies for their appreciation, or special learning for their comprehension; but they had universal and immediate significance.

It is true that the taste of the age led often to symbolic and allegoric representations. But even these were for the most part readily intelligible and familiar types, and, however cold abstractions they may now seem to us, with our altered modes of conception, they were full of warmth and significance in a time when religion and poetry alike found in symbolism the favorite mode of expression of the simplest and most affecting truths. The *Divine Comedy* is the proof of the permanent power of symbolic art, provided only that the artist be possessed

of imagination of sufficient force to give real form and life to the abstractions of the understanding.

Thus it is that the works of the painters of those days are the most important records of the times,—records, not indeed of historic incidents, but of the spirit, passions, and convictions of living men. They interpret character and history.

It would be not without interest to illustrate the close relation of art with life by the study in detail of some of the series of paintings with which the walls of the churches and palaces of these centuries are adorned; to read the application and interpretation of the Bible story, and of the fortunes and destiny of man, as they are depicted on the doubly sacred walls of the Pisan Campo Santo, or the representation of the life of St. Francis in the Bardi chapel in Santa Croce, or of the labors and triumph of St. Dominic and his order in the Spanish chapel; or some other of the multitude of similar works. But such a study might seem too remote from a practical application to the mood, the faith, and the demands of our own time. Instead of dwelling upon these, I turn to the paintings with which in the fourteenth century the Sienese adorned the walls of one of the halls of their public palace, the Palace of the Republic, the City Hall of the ardent, vigorous, beautiful little commonwealth.

It was in 1337 that Ambrogio Lorenzetti, one of the masters of the Sienese school, whose modern fame does not equal his deserts, was employed in decorating the Sala dei Nove, or Hall of the Nine, the chief magistracy of the republic, in which they were accustomed to hold their meetings. His work shows him to have been a poet, deeply imbued with the doctrine of his time, and especially with its taste for symbolism and readily intelligible allegory. His scheme of decoration included the whole surface of the walls, but his chief work consisted of three vast compositions, in the first of which he displayed, in a full pictorial allegory, the principles of good government with direct application to the Commune of Siena; the second fresco represents with fresh and varied illustrations the works and fruit of peace under a good government, while the third depicts the consequences of tyranny. It was no idle task that the painter undertook. Siena required the lessons which he proposed to set before the eyes of the citizens. He recognized the gravity of his commission. His imagination was quickened by the opportunity to give expression to truths that needed to be pressed home upon the hearts of the people. His conceptions were not the product of cool reflection, but of ardent sentiment and permanent conviction. His allegory should be easily read by all men. The beauty of its form should be but the transparent garb of its significance, and, while attracting the attention of the most careless observer, should fix it upon the meaning that lay beneath the surface. Siena had suffered deeply from the discord of her people, from the misgovernment of her rulers. There were few communities in Italy more turbulent, more distracted by faction. In spite of disorder, she yet had known prosperity. It was the part of the artist to hold up to her gaze the mirror of her own conditions and her own needs. In the whole field of painting I know of no more weighty piece of doctrine than these great works. It is vain to attempt to convey a true impression of them by description. I will point out only some of the striking features of the first of the series.

On the left of the spectator¹ hovers a crowned figure of Sapiencia; from her right hand depends the handle of a balance whose beam touches the head of a beautiful, serene, seated figure of Justice, who looks up to the Wisdom above. On either side of the head of Justice are the words which Dante in Paradise beheld the spirits of the Just form in their singing flight,—*Diligite justitiam qui judicatis terram*. With her right hand she holds even the scale of distributive justice, leaning out from which a winged figure with a sword in one hand strikes off the head of a criminal, while the other hand places a diadem upon the head of a virtuous ruler. With her left hand Justice holds even the scale of commutation, from which another winged figure is giving their allotted gifts to two kneeling personages. Beneath the feet of

¹ See the illustration, page 192.

Justice is seated Concord, holding in her left hand two cords of white and red which hang from the waists of the winged figures in the scales above. From her the united cords are received by a man in honorable garb, and carried by a procession of twenty-four persons, who advance two by two, and represent from the life the administrators of the government of the commonwealth, to the foot of a throne whereon sits a mighty and stately figure, crowned, holding in his right hand a sceptre to which the red and white cord is attached, and in his left a shield. On either side of his head are the letters C. S. C. V., *Comune Senarum Civitas Virginis*. Faith, Charity, and Hope float in the air above the image of the city. At his right sit figures of beautiful queenly women, representing Peace, and Fortitude, and Prudence; at his left, Magnanimity, Temperance, and Justice. At his feet, opposite the procession of the magistrates, is a group of subjects offering tribute, and of bound captives and malefactors guarded by soldiers on foot and on horseback.

Such is the main distribution of the principal figures of this speaking picture. Except for the difference in size of the figures according to their relative dignities, — a common piece of symbolism in the pictorial or sculptured representations of the Middle Ages, — there is little in this work that betrays immaturity of art, or that has not permanent as well as immediate significance. The allegory may indeed appear to us, with our wider political experience and our general literary education, to have almost a childish simplicity. In order to appreciate it truly, we should transfer ourselves in imagination to an age without printed books, of little acquaintance with history, and in which political reflection was with most men in its earliest stages. In all periods, even in our own, it is the simplest truths, the axioms of morality and of political philosophy, that chiefly need enforcing upon the mass of men. Even-handed justice, concord in spite of diversity of interest, integrity in public service, prudence in public counsel, temperance in political debate, are not yet so firmly established as rules of conduct, that the artist who should so illustrate them by poetic and imaginative treatment as to impress their worth more deeply upon the hearts of his contemporaries need doubt that he had rendered a great public service.

So beautiful was the figure of Peace in this picture of Lorenzetti's, so did she affect those who beheld her, that from the time she was painted the hall has borne her name, and been known as the Sala della Pace.

It is this want of recognition of the public ends of art, the lack of conviction of the function of the arts as the means by which the deepest sentiments and the highest ideals of the community are to be, not only expressed, but confirmed, that make our arts for the most part to-day so uninteresting, so unmeaning. It is of comparatively little use for painter or sculptor to offer the aid of his art to adorn the works of the architect, unless he have something to express in painting or in sculpture that shall add to the building more than a mere play of beautiful color, or of intricate forms of light and shade. He must have first something to say that shall be worth saying, — something by which the heart of the beholder shall be touched or his intelligence aroused. No matter how familiar his teaching may be, provided only that his own imagination find in it a strong motive, and that it be of concern, not to himself alone, but to the mass of men. In our times the artist will do well to avoid allegory; it is ill adapted to our prevailing temper and to modern modes of thought. It is not the form in which the poetic sentiment in these days inclines to embody itself. Modern allegories leave the reader or the beholder unmoved, and the public service of art may well be called in question if the artist chooses a mode of expression remote from the common understanding, and incapable of touching the emotions with direct and forcible appeal.

Suppose the artist inspired with the true spirit of the teachings of Christ, will he not find in the Gospel stories incidents of inexpressible and permanent interest to be interpreted afresh by his imagination? And would not the walls of our churches once more become beautiful, and be invested with sacred interest, could he, with his heart filled with the significance of the story,

depict upon them, with the vivid realism of poetic conception, the scenes from the life of the most beneficent of human teachers, in such wise as to give to the worshippers a fresh sense of the message of love, of brotherhood, of self-sacrifice, of purity, of which the world stands in need to-day as much as in any past time? Or if he be called upon to paint the walls of some legislative hall, is there nothing in the legend or history of his own land from which to draw eternal and universal lessons, conveyed by the representation of familiar incidents of heroic self-devotion, of pride in duty, of fortitude, of magnanimity, of honor?

Architecture demands such assistance from the other arts, and it is for the architects of public buildings in our country to build them with such design that the painters and sculptors shall feel that their own best work belongs to them, takes great part of its life from them, and that they shall thus be brought to seek such culture as is required for the production of works rich in interior content, as well as beautiful in color and in form. It was this union of significance of contents with beauty of representation that made the decorative works of the early Italian painters the models for all future art. As the ardor of imagination and of faith with which they were filled grew cold, and as the fancy sprang up that artistic treatment was alone sufficient, and the nature of the subject treated was matter of little concern, there crept on a general decline even in the purely decorative effects, and the crude extravagances of Giulio Romano and the absurdities of Bernini take the place of the grandeurs of Michelangelo and the sweet, gay decorations of Benozzo Gozzoli or Luca della Robbia. The roses of Botticelli are beautiful in their decorative character; but his roses grew in a garden in which he had walked in company with the goddesses of ancient days, or with the Virgin and the saints of Christian mythology.

I cannot but believe that the time shall come again when the three arts shall recognize their mutual dependence, and when painting and sculpture shall once more give architecture its noblest decoration. But it will come only when the architects themselves feel more deeply than at present the importance of their art in its moral and intellectual relations, as embodying in its monumental structures the expression of the character and the civilization of a race, as influencing the course of its spiritual development, as quickening its historic sense of obligation to the past and responsibility to the future. A great work of architecture, decorated with painting and with sculpture, is not a lifeless monument of the past, but a perpetual, living incentive to great achievements and high aims.

C. E. NORTON.

